

AT HOME WITH **ACCESS HOUSING** SUMMER 2020



Tenant stories and art headline NAIDOC Week celebrations

Access Housing was pleased to welcome Sydney and Leanne to our Rivervale office on Wednesday 11 November to speak to staff about their lives, connections to country and journeys as artists as part of our 2020 NAIDOC Week celebrations.

NAIDOC Week is an annual celebration of the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that was celebrated this year between 8-15 November.

Sydney and Leanne have been regular contributors to the Tenant Art Display at our Rivervale office since the commencement of the display in 2018. To celebrate NAIDOC Week, Access Housing displayed collections of Sydney and Leanne's work.

Sydney (pictured left) credits Access Housing for helping kickstart his artistic journey in 2018. Since then, he has taken strides in his journey as an artist. He has had his art displayed at galleries, hosted art talks and is now working with JAK Films to create a feature film about his family and connections to country called *Finding Moort*.

Within our NAIDOC Week Tenant Art Display, Leanne (pictured right) set up an exhibit featuring various items from her home that are of real importance to her, as well as some of her equally important paintings. She explained why;

"Access Housing gave me a home in 2009 when I was homeless and I wanted this space to feel like I was giving a piece of my home to them," Leanne said.

In addition to hearing Sydney and Leanne's stories, Access Housing staff were provided with an update from our General Manager Community Housing Natalie Sangalli on the progress of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) the company is working on in partnership with our Housing Choices Australia colleagues. Natalie is one of Access Housing's staff members who sits on the Housing Choices Australia Group of Companies RAP Working Committee.

You can read more about the RAP work we are doing in Natalie's column on page two of the newsletter.



Words from our Community Housing General Manager Natalie Sangalli

As detailed on the front page, our NAIDOC Week Tenant Art Display and artist talk was Access Housing's first NAIDOC Week event and was an important step in our journey of cultural understanding. I offer a heartfelt thank you to both Sydney and Leanne for coming to share their stories with our staff.

We have made strong progress on our *Reflect* Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and have had many staff undertake cultural competency training this year. Work on the RAP will continue in the new year.

Award season in the Housing sector has recently concluded. Access Housing and our staff were finalists for awards in the national PowerHousing Australia awards program as well as the Shelter WA awards program.

Access Housing was nominated twice for the *Excellence During the COVID-19 Pandemic (Rapid Response from the Sector) Award* in the Shelter WA awards program - once for our successful COVID-19 Tenant Hardship Fund and once for our Advisory Committee of Tenants (ACT). The ACT nomination was submitted by our ACT Chair Trish Owen in recognition of Access Housing's commitment to continuing the operation of the ACT during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in WA.

Access Housing is now a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Provider. Specialist Disability Accommodation refers to accommodation for NDIS participants who require specialist housing to assist with their very high support needs. Specialist Disability Accommodation funding is not for support services, but is instead for the homes in which these services are delivered.

Now that Access Housing is a registered SDA provider, we are determined to be a driving force in the SDA market within WA. In doing so, we are thrilled to be able to further our commitment to providing affordable and secure housing solutions for people living with a disability.

2020 has been a year like no other, and we now find ourselves at the end of it. I wish you and your loved ones a safe and happy holiday season and look forward to seeing you all again in 2021.



INFORMATION FOR TENANTS

ACCESS HOUSING HOLIDAY OFFICE CLOSURES



All Access Housing offices will be closed over the Christmas / New Year period from **4pm Thursday 24 December 2020** until **8.30am Monday 4 January 2021**.

Offices will also be closed on **Tuesday 26 January 2021** for the Australia Day public holiday and **Monday 1 March 2021** for the Labour Day public holiday.



CONTAINERS FOR CHANGE

Western Australia's *Containers for Change* deposit scheme aims to increase recycling rates, reduce litter and benefit the community.

Through *Containers for Change*, you can return your eligible empty containers for a 10 cent refund, which you can either collect yourself or donate to a registered charity.

Most aluminium, glass, plastic and steel beverage containers are eligible for a refund.

Please visit containersforchange.com.au for more information.

ARE YOU ELIGIBLE FOR NDIS SPECIALIST DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION (SDA)?



People who are eligible for SDA have extremely high needs and need to live in very specialised homes, usually with high levels of person-to-person support.

Funding is only provided to NDIS participants who meet specific eligibility criteria. For more information about eligibility, visit www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/operational-guidelines/specialist-disability-accommodation-operational-guideline/whos-eligible-sda.

If you are investigating housing solutions within your NDIS plan, or wish to find out more, please call Access Housing on 9430 0900 for a chat.



SUMMER SAFETY

As the weather heats up, it is important to think about safety in the home. Access Housing has some information and reminders that can help you to stay safe over Summer.

SMOKE ALARM SAFETY

Access Housing has at least one smoke alarm in each of our properties and we test them each time we do a property inspection at your home.

Smoke alarms need regular testing and cleaning to make sure they provide effective protection. All tenants should do their own smoke alarm tests monthly, in addition to the testing we do during property inspections.

Here's how you can check your smoke alarm

1. Test each smoke alarm by pressing and holding the test button (if you can't reach, use a broom or mop handle) until you hear the alert beeping tone.
2. The alert beeping tone should stop after a few seconds. If it doesn't, press the test button again.
3. If your smoke alarm doesn't beep, ring the Access Housing Maintenance Hotline immediately on 1800 203 383.

Keep your smoke alarm free of dust and cobwebs by vacuuming around your smoke alarm vents with a soft brush attachment at least once every few months.

Smoke alarms save lives!

Do not remove, tape over or damage the smoke alarms in your home. Repairs to smoke alarms that have been removed or deliberately damaged will result in a tenant liability charge.

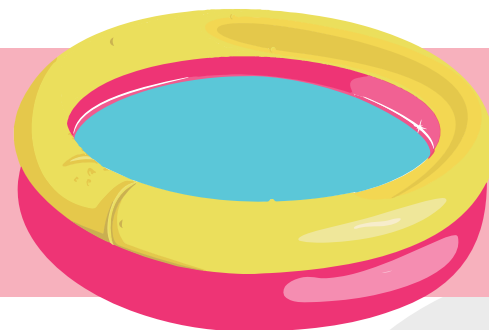
Visual / vibrating smoke alarms

For tenants who are hearing impaired, there are smoke alarms that display a strobe light warning and have a vibrating pad that you can put under your pillow. These alarms can be purchased as part of your NDIS package or through a Disability Equipment Grant.

Please contact your Tenancy Officer to let us know if you require a visual smoke alarm and for more information on funding.

SWIMMING POOLS AND PONDS

Tenants are reminded that, in the interest of safety, Access Housing does not approve the installation of swimming pools, ponds or water features at any of our properties. This includes temporary, portable and inflatable pools or spas.



STAYING SAFE IN THE HEAT

Extreme heat can affect anybody, but the most at risk are seniors, young children and people with a medical condition. Heat stress occurs when our body is unable to cool itself enough to maintain a healthy temperature. Normally, the body cools itself by sweating, but sometimes sweating isn't enough and the body temperature can continue to rise.

How can heat related illnesses be prevented in the home?

- Drink water, even if you don't feel thirsty.
- Keep your home cool by closing windows and curtains during the day and opening them in the evening to let cool air in.
- Shut off rooms you aren't using and save the fan and/or air-conditioner for where you need it the most.
- Barbecue outdoors in the evening to avoid oven cooked meals that heat your home.
- Help others: visit or phone friends, family and neighbours who are more at risk.
- Have a plan: know who to call if you need help and follow your doctor's advice if you have any medical conditions.

If you are feeling unwell and do not know what to do next, call Healthdirect on 1800 022 222 to speak with a registered nurse.



ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF TENANTS UPDATE



**From the ACT
Chairperson**
Trish Owen

To state the obvious, this year has been very different!

I would like to start by applauding current ACT members and Access Housing staff on their commitment to the ACT during COVID-19. It was a year of learning for us all.

Reflecting on this past year as an ACT member, I am encouraged at what we have managed to accomplish during these challenging times. At the beginning of the year we had many tenant priority areas to work on based on tenant feedback from the tenant survey, ACT AGMs and tenant focus groups. We have worked to try and address these priority areas.

Throughout the year, your ACT has provided feedback to Access Housing regarding maintenance issues and had a hand in the beginning of *Maintenance Matters* tenant information groups. We have also provided feedback about how Access Housing could

better communicate with tenants about rent and had many conversations about how Access Housing can support tenants to stay socially connected.

At the conclusion of our first year as a committee, I think we have fulfilled our purpose of being a platform of communication between Access Housing and its community of tenants and providing a tenant voice on the delivery of Access Housing's services.

As good as all this is, we still want more! Going forward, we want to further amplify the voices of tenants and connect with you and hear about your ideas and issues. One way we will do this is by attending more tenant groups so we can meet more tenants. We also want to have more interactions with Access Housing staff to ensure Access Housing is meeting the needs of tenants. This includes getting more staff involved in attending ACT meetings and tenant groups and the sharing of tenant issues and feedback with broader staff.

Wishing you all a safe and happy New Year!

Trish

HOW THE ACT ADDRESSED TENANT PRIORITIES IN 2020 WITH ACCESS HOUSING

Improving social connection and access to support for older tenants and tenants with disability

- Access Housing held our first ever End of Year Celebration events, based on ACT feedback.
- Access Housing developed the *Conversations about Change* series of groups, based on ACT feedback.

Sustainable and environmentally friendly homes

- ACT provided input around how we can involve tenants in decisions around environmentally friendly upgrades at complexes.

Tenant involvement in repairs and maintenance

- ACT has consulted with Access Housing around new ways for tenants to provide feedback about our maintenance services.
- New *Maintenance Matters* section in the tenant newsletter, based on ACT feedback.

Improving communications around tenancy matters and rent setting

- ACT provided input into how we can improve communication around rental and water statements.
- Access Housing is reviewing our inspection letters, based on feedback from the ACT.



ACTIONING TENANT SURVEY FEEDBACK

In the Spring edition of *At Home with Access Housing*, we shared some of the results from this year's Tenant Survey. This edition, we want to let you know how we are responding to feedback provided by tenants in the survey.

How we handle complaints

You told us we could improve how we keep you informed throughout the complaints process and the speed in which we handle complaints.

What we will do

Access Housing will be reviewing our complaint management procedures. This will include reviewing how we handle complaints and how we communicate with tenants who make a complaint.

Rights and responsibilities

You told us we could do more to help tenants understand their rights and responsibilities.

What we will do

Access Housing will develop a *Welcome Inspection Pack* to provide new tenants with more information about their rights and responsibilities as Access Housing tenants.

Access Housing will also be replacing our 'on hold' phone music with information messages. This means that when tenants call Access Housing reception and are put on hold, they will get more information about their rights and responsibilities.



MAKING ALTERATIONS TO YOUR HOME

We recognise you may want to make alterations to your home to make it more comfortable and suitable for your needs.

We ask all tenants to please remember that you must obtain written permission from Access Housing before making any alterations or modifications to your home. This is so we can ensure your home remains safe and in accordance with relevant building codes.

How to seek approval for alterations

To make a home alteration request, please contact your Tenancy Officer who will direct you to the appropriate form and talk about the approval process with you. If your request is approved, you are responsible for the purchase, installation and upkeep of approved alterations. If the alteration is minor and you can do it yourself, it must be done to a professional standard. When you seek approval, we will advise you if the work needs to be done by a professional tradesperson.

Fast facts about alterations:

- NDIS and My Aged Care-funded alterations must be approved by Access Housing **before** any modifications are made to your home.
- At the end of the tenancy, you may need to remove alterations and repair any damage caused.
- Permission will always be granted to anchor furniture to walls to protect children and vulnerable adults. The anchors must be removed and the walls repaired at the end of the tenancy.
- There are special rules for necessary alterations to prevent family violence.
- If you carry out works at your home without approval, you may be charged the cost of removing the works and the repair of damaged caused.

TAKING PHOTOS AT TENANCY INSPECTIONS

During tenancy inspections, your Tenancy Officer will take photos of your home to record the general condition of the property and photograph anything requiring maintenance.

Access Housing is committed to protecting your privacy, so we kindly ask you to consider temporarily removing any personal or identifying information (eg: photos and certificates) during inspections so they are not inadvertently captured in the photos we take.



MAINTENANCE MATTERS



Our Property Assets team builds, buys and maintains affordable homes for tenants. As a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation, Access Housing reinvests earnings into growing our property portfolio so we can assist more people into secure housing.

Access Housing manages more than 1,800 homes across the Perth, Peel and South West regions. Over the past seven years, we have also delivered more than 300 new affordable homes at a cost of more than \$70 million.

Access Housing undertakes different kinds of maintenance on our properties, including:



Responsive maintenance

Unplanned maintenance where we repair something that breaks.



Planned maintenance

Scheduled replacement of items such as kitchens, flooring etc.



Cyclical maintenance

Regular maintenance tasks such as smoke alarm checks, lift services and fire inspection services.



Garden maintenance

Common areas at complexes.



Voids maintenance

When a tenant vacates, we assess the property and complete maintenance works before a new tenant moves in.

KEYS



Everyone knows that sinking feeling you get when you realise you've locked yourself out of your home.

If this happens to you during our normal business hours, you can contact your local Access Housing office to borrow our set of keys for your home - but you'll need to make sure you return them. If you can't get to the office, we can arrange a locksmith to come to your home, but you will be charged for this.

Outside of business hours, you can ring our Maintenance Hotline for an emergency call out. This will cost you the locksmith fee **and** an after-hours call out fee.

The best way to avoid this situation is to think ahead and plan what you will do if you lock yourself out. This may be as simple as giving a spare key to a trusted friend or family member or keeping a spare key in your purse or wallet.

Hiding a spare key outside your home is not recommended.

There are key safe boxes you can buy, which vary in cost and quality. Make sure you seek advice and information from a reliable, independent source such as the WA Police before making a purchase.



If you plan to affix a lockbox permanently to a wall at your home, please remember to seek Access Housing's permission before you do.

PREVENTING BLOCKED TOILETS

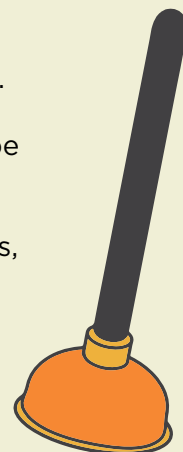
Blocked toilets are often caused by flushing items that cannot break down and end up clogging the toilet drain. Blocked toilets can lead to flooding and other property damage.

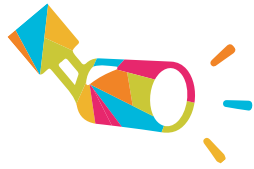
If toilet blockages at your home are caused by flushing non-flushable materials, you will be responsible for the cost of repairs.

Human waste and toilet paper are the only things you should flush down the toilet. Tissues, paper towels, feminine hygiene products and even wipes that are advertised as being flushable can cause toilet blockages because they absorb water and do not break down.

A slow or weak toilet flush often indicates that a clog is forming in your toilet drain. Small clogs can also be caused by flushing too much toilet paper at once. Use a plunger to try and release clogs or small blockages before they become a more serious issue.

If you have a blocked toilet, please call our Maintenance Hotline on **1800 203 383** so we can assist.





TENANT GROUP SPOTLIGHT

Access Housing was thrilled to run COVIDsafe face-to-face tenant engagement events over the past three months. Outcomes from our first *Maintenance Matters* and *Conversations about Wellness* groups are detailed below.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT WELLNESS

Access Housing launched our *Conversations about Wellness* groups in response to tenant feedback that social isolation was the biggest challenge some had faced this year.

In October and November, Access Housing held our first *Conversations about Wellness* groups at Rockingham Central Library and Armadale Library. Tenants were joined at the groups by local council Community Development Officers, Librarians and Access Housing staff.

Tenants discussed activities they participate in to keep well and listened with great interest to the wide range of activities on offer in their local community and at their local library. Tenants also had the opportunity to join the library on the day.

Top tips for Rockingham tenants

- Tenants recommend attending the Autumn Centre for seniors groups and activities.
- *Rockingham Connect* is a City of Rockingham door-to-door community transport service, which is available for a small fee for eligible locals.

Top tips for Armadale tenants

- Armadale Library is conveniently located in the Armadale Central Shopping Centre. This library offers computer classes, knitting groups, book clubs, men's groups and more!
- Seville Grove Library will be running a *Navigating the Aged Care System* session in January.

For information about what is on in your area, visit your local library or local council website.

MAINTENANCE MATTERS

On Wednesday 4 November Access Housing held our first ever *Maintenance Matters* tenant information session at Fremantle.

Tenants were joined by members of our Property Services department including General Manager Property Assets Duane Moroney, Property Services Manager Chantal Swanepoel and Technical Services Officer Stephen Hunt.

Access Housing staff shared information about our Maintenance and Property Services teams and talked about aspects of our maintenance services. This included discussions about maintenance timeframes, fair wear and tear, modifications in the home and how to avoid tenant liability charges.

Tenants also had the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback directly to staff about our maintenance services.

Members of our Advisory Committee of Tenants attended the *Maintenance Matters* group and provided valuable feedback about how we can continue to improve how we communicate with tenants about maintenance.

If you would like a *Conversations about Wellness* or *Maintenance Matters* group to be held in your area, please get in touch with our Tenant Support and Capacity Building Officer Alex Kepes on 0437 887 675.



(1) Tenants at the Armadale *Conversations about Wellness* group with librarian Sandra and Community Development Officer Kristin.
(2) Property Services Manager Chantal Swanepoel talking to tenants at the Fremantle *Maintenance Matters* session.

SUMMER PUZZLE - WIN A \$50 BUNNINGS VOUCHER!

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FIND THESE WORDS IN
THE GRID - GOOD LUCK!

HOLIDAY
CELEBRATE
NEW
YEAR
SUMMER
SPLASH
SWIM
SUNSHINE
VACATION
HEAT
BEACH
BARBECUE
OUTDOORS
PICNIC
SMOKE
ALARM
POOL
RECYCLING
KEYS
NAIDOC

Find all the words in the word search except for one, which is not actually in the grid. Words may be forward, backward, up, down or diagonal. Write this leftover word on a postcard or piece of paper with your full name, address and contact number and post it to **At Home Summer Puzzle**, Access Housing, PO Box 105, Burswood WA 6100 or hand it in at your local office. Competition closes Friday 5 March 2021. The winner of a \$50 Bunnings voucher will be drawn from all the correct entries after this date. Only one entry per household. Good luck!

**Congratulations
to Jason from
Hilton, last edition's
puzzle prize winner.**

MERGER UPDATE

As you know, earlier this year Access Housing merged with Melbourne-based Housing Choices Australia (HCA) to form one of Australia's largest Community Housing Providers.

As a result of the merger, Access Housing is the WA-based member company in the Housing Choices Australia Group of Companies. Other state-based member companies in the Group include:



Access Housing will soon start making some adjustments to our website, letters to tenants and other company materials to further assist with our integration into the Housing Choices Australia Group of Companies. **None of the adjustments will impact our day-to-day service provision to tenants.** More information about this will be sent to all tenants early in the new year.

We will also be hosting an event in mid-February 2021 where tenants will be able to meet and speak with senior Housing Choices Australia staff who will be in Perth for the first time since WA relaxed its hard border with the eastern states. Tenants will be able to learn more about the Housing Choices Australia Group of Companies and take part in a Q&A session with senior HCA staff. If you would like to attend this event, please express your interest by emailing alex.kepes@accesshousing.org.au.

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Peel Office

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